

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 CIEP-01 /084 W

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R 031719Z EAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9517

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY OSLO

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

USMISSION GENEVA

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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E.O 11652: N/A

TAGS: OINT, OGOV. UK

SUBJECT: COVENTRY BY-ELECTION OUTLOOK

REF: LONDON 2973

SUMMARY - MARCH 4 BY.-ELECTION IN COVENTRY IS EXOECTED TO
DETERMINE WHETHER LABOR GOVERNMENT RETAINS ITS CURRENT
ONE SEAT MAJORITY IN COMMONS. LOW VOTER TURNOUT AND GEN-
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ERAL DISSATISFACTION WITH CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION
COULD SWING SEAT TO CONSERVATIVES, BUT OUR BEST GUESS IS
THAT LABOR WILL RETAIN IT. ALBEIT BY REDUCED MARGIN. END
SUMMARY.

1. EMBOFF VISITED COVENTRY MARCH 2 TO OBSERVE CRITICAL
BY-ELECTION CAMPAIGN. RESULTS OF WHICH ARE EXPECTED TO
DETERMINE WHETHER WILSON GOVERNMENT WILL RETAIN ITS SINGLE
SEAT MAJORITY IN HOUSE OF COMMONS (RETEL). COVENTRY
BY-ELECTION FORMERLY TRADITIONALLY LABOR SEAT (OCTOBER 1974
MAJORITY 7500) WILL BE HELD MARCH 4 AND WILL BE FOLLOWED
MARCH 11 BY ELECTIONS TO FILL TWO VACANT AND REASONABLY
SAFE CONSERVATIVE SEATS AT THE WIRRAL AND CARSHALTON.

2. LABOR CANDIDATE, GEOFFREY ROBINSON, IS DYNAMIC. ATTRACTIVE
YOUNG (36) BUSINESS EXECUTIVE WITH IMPECCABLE LABOR PARTY
CREDENTIALS -- HE HAS BEEN PARTY MEMBER FOR 20 YEARS AND
WAS ONCE MEMBER OF TRANSPORT HOUSE RESEARCH STAFF.
ROBINSON HAS STRONG BASE IN COVENTRY, HAVING BEEN
SENIOR EXECUTIVE AT JAGUAR CARS AND BRITISH LEYLAND, AND
IS CURRENTLY ADVISER TO MERIDEN MOTORCYCLE COOPERATIVE.
CONSERVATIVES ARE CHALLENGING WITH JONATHAN GUINNESS.
BANKER AND SCION OF FAMOUS BREWING FAMILY. GUINNESS
UNSUCCESSFULLY CONTESTED COVENTRY IN FEBRUARY AND OCTOBER
1974, AND IN PAST HAS SUFFERED FROM FOOT-IN-MOUTH DISEASE.
LIBERALS ARE BACKING LOCAL TV PERSONALITY, ALAN LEIGHTON.
FIELD IS ROUNDED OUT BY NATIONAL FRONT AND TWO INDEPENDENT
CANDIDATES. BECAUSE OF ITS SIGNIFICANCE, COVENTRY
CAMPAIGN IS RECEIVING CONSIDERABLE NATIONAL MEDIA ATTENTION.

3. DESPITE MEDIA COVERAGE, VISIBLE INDICATIONS OF LOCAL
INTEREST IN CAMPAIGN ARE DIFFICULT TO DISCERN. LIBERALS,
WHO MOST OBSERVERS DO NOT BELIEVE STAND A CHANCE OF WINNING.
HAVE MOUNTED CAMPAIGN BLITZ, BUSSING NEARLY ALL OF
LIBERAL PARLIAMENTARY GROUP TO COVENTRY MARCH 1 TO LEAD
MAJOR CANVASS EFFORT AND PUBLICIZE FUND-RAISING DINNER.
YET ON MARCH 2 EMBOFF SAW FORLORN LOOKING LIBERAL CANDIDATE
IN LOCAL SHOPPING CENTER STRUGGLING TO FIND HANDS TO SHAKE.
MOST PEOPLE SEEMED TO PASS HIM WITH EYES AVERTED.

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BY WAY OF CONTRAST. BOTH LABOR AND CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATES SEEM TO BE RUNNING LOW-KEY CAMOAGNS, THOUGH TORY LEADER THATCHER TRAVELED TO COVENTRY MARCH 1 AND WORKED SHOPPING CENTERS WITH GUINNESS. LABOR HAS AVOIDED SENDING CABINET MINISTERS TO COVENTRY, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE PARTY BELIEVES UNEMPLOYMENT AND RECENT SPENDING CUTS MAY HAVE LEFT ITS CANDIDATE VULNERABLE.

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4. A SWING OF TEN PERCENT OF THE VOTE FROM LABOR TO CONSERVATIVE WOULD BE REQUIRED TO GIVE THE SEAT TO THE TORIES. BASED ON OBSERVATION OF LABOR CAMPAIGN, DISCUSSIONS WITH COVENTRY AND NATIONAL PRESS CORRESPONDENTS COVERING CAMPAIGN. AND ANALYSIS OF ELECTORAL DATA, WE CONCLUDE THAT LABOR WILL PROBABLY HOLD SEAT, BUT BY A REDUCED MARGIN. THERE ARE FEW OVERT INDICATIONS OF DISSATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT AND THERE WAS CONSENSUS AMONG THOSE WITH WHOM EMBOFF SPOKE THAT OUTCOME WILL HINGE ON LEVEL OF VOTEP PARTICIPATION. DATA FROM PREVIOUS ELECTIONS AND NATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN BY-ELECTIONS INDICATE THAT TORIES WMULD BENEFIT FROM LOW TURNOUT. LIBERAL VOTE MAY ALSO HAVE MARGINAL INFLUENCE, AS RESULTS OF LAST TWO ELECTIONS INDICATE ENTRY OF LIBERAL CANDIDATE HURTS LABOR SLIGHTLY MORE THAN IT HURTS CONSERVATIVES. TORY PARTY AND MRS. THATCHER, HOWEVER, ARE EXPECTED TO FIND CONSOLATION EVEN IN A REDUCED LABOR MAJORITY, AS THEY COULD CLAIM IT IS OLE FURTHER INDICATION OF ERODING SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT.

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